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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: TAIWAN'S OBSERVER STATUS AT WHA

¶1. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies focused May 1 news coverage on the world's upgraded alert on the H1N1 flu outbreak and the Taiwan government's anti-epidemic plan; on Taiwan's observer status at this year's World Health Assembly (WHA); and on the surge of the Taiwan Stock Exchange index Thursday after Taiwan said Chinese institutional investors are allowed to buy Taiwan stocks.

¶2. In terms of editorials and commentaries, an op-ed in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" discussed the rapid development of cross-strait relations over the past year. The article concluded that, while both the Obama Administration and the Ma Ying-jeou Administration race to improve their relations with China, they have "overlooked the growing imbalance across the Taiwan Strait and the question of how to address the challenges to Washington-Beijing-Taipei ties brought about by the change in the larger environment." An editorial in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" discussed Taiwan's observer status at the WHA this year and said that, even though Taiwan is said to have joined the WHA as an observer, it is an acceptable development judged from a realistic perspective. Editorials in the pro-unification "United Daily News," the centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times," and the conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" all hailed the fact that Taiwan is able to participate in this year's WHA as an observer. An editorial in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times," however, called the WHA's invitation a sweet poison that will eventually push Taiwan another step toward unification with China. End summary.

A) " Is the United States Losing Control of the Cross-Strait Situation?"

Lin Cheng-yi, a research fellow at the Academia Sinica's Institute of European and American Studies, opined in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 700,000] (5/1):

"... The two sides of the Taiwan Strait are now facing the greatest and most rapid improvement in their mutual relations over the past six decades. Observers in the United States, China and Taiwan have noted the burgeoning imbalance between the two sides in terms of politics, economics, military and mentality. The opposition DPP, no matter whether they try to restrain or boycott, can hardly change the overall situation. Beijing, meanwhile, is strengthening its all-out contact with Taiwan via the three platforms -- the KMT-CCP forum, the talks between Taiwan's Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF) and China's Association for Relations across the Taiwan Strait (ARATS), and the forum between civil society across the Taiwan Strait. In Taiwan, however, two different sets of political views regarding the island's China policy are emerging and appear to diverge more and more. ...

"The increasing imbalance between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait in terms of politics, economics, military and mentality has created a series of challenges for U.S. policy. A view generally held by the United States is that the Ma Administration is alleviating its political tension with China, but the new strategy is not without risk. How is the U.S. government going to address the unprecedented

development in [the relations] across the Taiwan Strait, or is it able to address the case of the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA) only and passively indicate that the agreement must not endanger U.S. interests in Taiwan? Beijing, [on the other hand,] in addition to the significantly relaxed economic and political relations with Taiwan, wants to exclude the role of the United States in the military confidence-building mechanism and peace pact between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait. ...

"Former AIT Chairman Richard Bush admitted that China's rise has made it more complicated for both the United States and Taiwan to maintain a common strategic view. What Bush kept without saying was that China's rise, plus the enhanced power on Beijing's part to dictate cross-Strait relations, have reduced the United States' influence in Taiwan affairs. The Clinton Administration was unable to control communications between the secret envoys across the Taiwan Strait, and the Obama Administration also finds it difficult to control the details of cross-Strait negotiations. The top priority for the Obama Administration and the Ma Administration in terms of their [respective] foreign policy is to race to improve relations with China, but they have both overlooked the growing imbalance across the Taiwan Strait and the question of how to address the challenges to Washington-Beijing-Taipei ties brought about by the change in the larger environment."

B) "Yes, [Taiwan's WHA Observer Status] Is Sad, But What Else Can be Done?"

The mass-circulation "Apple Daily" [circulation: 520,000] editorialized (5/1):

"With China's approval, Taiwan is able to attend the World Health Assembly in the capacity of observer. Even though Taiwan felt

frustrated and [believed this was] unfair, it has finally managed to make a stride toward the international community. It is, generally speaking, acceptable, judging from a realistic perspective. ... Ma Ying-jeou said we should ignore history but pay attention to geography, and such is realism. ... Taiwan must get itself to return to ground zero and start with the smallest achievement; if it can get observer status, then observer status it is. As long as it does not touch on the core of Taiwan's sovereignty, it gives no cause for much criticism if the island has to make some peripheral concessions. Yes, it is sad, but what else can be done?"

C) "[Taiwan's] Participation in the WHA: A Major Achievement with Disappointment"

The pro-unification "United Daily News" [circulation: 400,000] editorialized (5/1):

"... Taiwan was invited to participate in the World Health Assembly, and such a development showed both nominal and substantive significance. ... Even though one must not exaggerate the significance of such a development [for Taiwan], as there is disappointment in the aspect that it is only 'observer status' judged on 'an year-to-year basis,' and under the name of 'Chinese Taipei,' being able to achieve such a state is not easy. Pragmatically speaking, Taiwan has got hold of a valid pass for its bid to join the international community. ...

"With regard to this breakthrough, if it is viewed as one of the results of President Ma Ying-jeou's 'modus vivendi' foreign policy, then an obvious factor behind it is a so-called 'goodwill' gesture of Beijing. ... If both sides of the Taiwan Strait hope to reach a peace pact, and given that the Beijing authorities will surely not abandon the 'one China' framework, the room for both sides 'to express or interpret' ['one China'] should at least be kept. That way it can fill the basis for both sides to 'interact' on an equal footing; not to block Taiwan's role in the international community is one way to show that Beijing is turning its 'goodwill' into a real gesture of 'sincerity.' ..."

D) "Taiwan Should Have More Confidence in Itself"

The centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" [circulation: 130,000] editorialized (5/1):

"... Even though the formal name of our country was not used, the invitation [from the World Health Organization] has not only recognized the official status of our country's Department of Health (DOH) and its chief but has also invited the DOH to participate in the World Health Assembly. We have gained respect and recognition in terms of the bottom line of sovereignty and dignity on which we insisted, so this is a rare breakthrough. ... Beijing's willingness to loosen its grip is the main reason behind such a breakthrough. Being able to agree that Taiwan is invited with the official titles of the DOH and DOH minister showed that Beijing has adjusted its previous strategy in hopes that the Taiwan people will feel its goodwill. ..."

E) "WHA Invite Shows Progress"

The conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (5/1):

"For the first time since the ROC government was expelled from the United Nations in 1971, representatives of Taipei will be seated at the World Health Assembly (WHA) when it convenes in Geneva later this month for its annual meeting. ... The moniker [in the invitation] marked a major change from the United Nations-affiliated body's previous practice of referring to the ROC government as 'Taiwan, China' or 'Taiwan, province of China.' More importantly, this was the first time that the DOH was invited to the WHA since the government first began seeking participation in 1997."

F) "WHA's Invitation Is Sweet Poison"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (5/1):

"One short faxed letter from WHO Director-General Margaret Chan inviting 'Chinese Taipei' to participate in this month's World Health Assembly (WHA) brought an end to 13 years of disappointment on Tuesday when Taiwan finally achieved its goal of representation at the WHO. The government predictably patted itself on the back, attributing the watershed to its 'modus vivendi' policy of not provoking China, and sought to demonstrate that it had not compromised Taiwan's sovereignty to gain this achievement. But at what cost was this 'breakthrough' achieved? The very fact that Taiwan had to be invited and was not admitted in the usual manner is the first cause for concern. The invitation came after secret negotiations last month between representatives from Taipei and

Beijing. And while many in Taiwan will be pleased with the result, it is imperative that the government stick to its March 13 promise that it will release information at an appropriate time about how this was achieved. ...

"People should not be content with reassurances that this is just the latest example of Beijing's 'goodwill' if such goodwill is conditional on the Taiwanese government considering itself part of China. While 'Chinese Taipei' maybe an acceptable name to the government, to the rest of the world it implies that Taiwan is under Beijing's heel. ... Another problem is that the invitation only applies to this year. Fears that the invitation will need renewing on an annual basis seem to have been confirmed. This is a worrying development as it means Beijing will now have the ability to hold Taiwanese and their health concerns to a form of ransom. How long will it be before we start seeing election slogans such as 'Vote KMT, stay in the WHA?'

While many people may be happy about what they see as the fruits of President Ma Ying-jeou's cross-strait labor, they may not be so ecstatic when they realize this government has pushed them another step toward unification."

YOUNG